AN AREA CREATED BY ITS OWN LEXICON: CONSTRUCTION OF TEXTUAL SPATIALITY IN REPRESENTATIVE AUSTRALIAN EXPLORATION AND SETTLER NARRATIVES

Thesis Synopsis

Areas of research:

1. The conceptual and historical parameters determining the generic parameters of 'exploration narrative' and 'travel narrative', the ways they have been subjected to a multiplicity of socio-historical conditioning processes. These include-

    i) Political-expansionist programmes of the colonial outreach of Continental forces.
    ii) Ontological programmes for generating functional knowledge with some sort of use-value.
    iii) Cartographic programmes for 'organizing' the available landmass and sea-routes of a yet-only-partially-known planet.
    iv) Cultural programmes of making sense of the radical as well as not-so-radical alterity in a way that seems interesting to the average European.
    v) Revisionist programmes of exporting the European 'exceptionalism' to a geographically different locale and rediscovering the racial-civilizational greatness of the Judeo-Christian civilization.
    vi) Representational programmes for narrativizing the exploratory experiences in such a way that is exciting and encouraging, intriguing yet satisfactorily informative.

2. Narratives of exploration to and inside Australia, beginning with Cook's journals (two), Accounts of Captain Tobias Furneaux, Matthew Flinders, Watkin Tench, Gregory Blaxland, John Oxley, Edmund Kennedy, Leichhardt, Edward John Eyre, Charles Sturt, Thomas

Mitchell-all written roughly within a stretch of a century (1765-1870). Taking cognizance of the proper nature of the way the 'decentered' project of inland Australian explorations took place, and the gradual emergence of an Australian identity. The discursive construct of a unique Australian identity eventually transitions into the Australian nationhood and understanding this critical shift requires a comprehensive overview of all that was written about this place across so many narratives.

3. Narratives of probable, imagined, counterfactual histories and cultures in which the Australian ethno-spatial history and geography, its existent demographic reality have been reimagined- from Joseph Hall (back in 1605) to Lady Mary Fox, Ernst Favenc, J. F. Hogan, W. Carlton Dawe and Alexander McDonald (as recently as 1906). Analyses of imaginary mechanisms that conjure substitute spaces, alternate histories, thereby creating a palimpsest in which the compensatory, imaginary takes on the Australian space are grafted onto the 'real' accounts of engaging with the physical space.

Argument:

Present thesis conceives the sub-genre of travel writing as nothing short of a representational type that also functions as a genre of cultural translation, as a textual record that registers the massive temperamental change which followed the Enlightenment in Europe and generated what can be referred to as an 'exploration subculture'. Large-scale exploratory projects undertaken by various European powers during and after the Enlightenment were never straightforward attempts at colonial outreach only; they embodied the sort of 'strategic exchange' that happened among a diversity of factors/areas which can be as apparently unrelated as progress made in hydrography and contemporary censorship laws pertaining to publication. Travel or exploration (although not necessarily the same) as they were 'performed', created a network of data which was incessantly adopted, adapted and reconfigured to generate interstitial spaces of understanding that eventually contributed to a diversity of emplacement processes. Exploration accounts actively contributed to the creation of a new organizational

paradigm in terms of 'textualizing' hitherto unmapped territory and ethnographic alterity; and thus can be argued to have initiated extensive changes in a number of emergent, distinctive ontologies and epistemologies.

Therefore, exploration and its documentation or 'narrativization' is a conscious, dense textual performance that negotiates a multiplicity of factors and an existent structure of thought on how the 'programme' is to be achieved. What differentiates the New World exploration accounts, especially those recording inland inroads into the Australian landmass, however, is the fact of a resounding absence of a sort of 'fallback' frame of reference. The lack of any pre-existing schematic of topographic description that could make sense to one trained in post-Enlightenment mechanistic systems of information-processing proved to be a significant absence which was required to be addressed. This study seeks to illustrate how representative exploration narratives written on the incremental 'opening up' of Australian interiors contribute to a steady fabrication of a kind of distinctive spatial schematic that was supposed to address this lack, this non-existence, and construct a functional, convenient and serviceable 'estimate' of the landmass.

This project seeks not only to analyze in detail representative exploration narratives that to a significant extent 'manufactured' specific response to what came to be identified as the distinctive Australian experience; it also attempts at a reconsideration of how the Australian identity itself is inalienably tethered to space-as-vicariously, alternately and imaginatively experienced. This study maintains that what the explorers and texts sought to represent was a kind of chorography that tried to arrest a/n (in)definite spatiotemporal 'flavour' that could then be identified with a unique location through narratives which could justify that specific construct.

The points of departure:

There are **three** ways present thesis seeks to offer something new:

i) This study analyzes in satisfactory detail the growth and evolution of post-Enlightenment exploration narratives and the way they fabricate one particular planetary, inclusive image through specific modes of representation in which the issue of loco-description is as much aesthetic as it is political.

ii) This study features textual analyses of specific narrative trends with references to specific Australian exploration narratives and the way particular types of representational modalities structure specific way-s of approaching the issues of spatiality and emplacement and engagement with the locals.

iii) This study takes into account real and non-real delineations and imagining-s of space across genres and subgenres of exploration and travel that make 'spatial structuring' nomothetic as well as oneiric, -thus contributing to an inclusive notion of one unique spatiality-something that can also be construed as an inescapable trapping of nation-formation.

Research methodology and theoretical rubric:

I have attempted a comprehensive layout of the existent critical studies relevant to the present study, one that has sought to locate the hitherto-undertheorized methodological field of travel studies and exploration narratives within an established discourse of Postcolonial Studies. But as this thesis has consistently maintained, the practice of documenting personal experiences of exploration is something that transcends the ethno-political binaries and chauvinistic

expansionism implied in a postcolonial critical discourse. This is why the present thesis features cross-text discussions and intertextual analyses that have incorporated a number of famous and not-so-widely-acknowledged exploration texts that were published following a number of inland explorations into the continental landmass of Australia.

A somewhat detailed survey of the texts is supposed to substantiate the fundamental outline of the argument of this project with relevant references. The theoretical framework used can be argued to have been borrowed from that of the postcolonial studies but it is not necessarily restricted within that rubric. An overwhelming amount of textual research conducted in the field of Australian studies has been too reliant upon the postcolonial theoretical framework as it can be brought to bear upon issues like settler colonialism, imperial appropriation of Australian reality in cartographic projections, literary fictions, a multiplicity of nonfictional texts and of course, Aboriginal studies. While operating from within the overarching conceptual fold of postcolonialism, my argument has also striven to capitalize on such diverse methodological fields as Cartography, space- and place-formation related theorizations, Ethnography, Onomastics, Aesthetics and so on. This project aspires to be cross-disciplinary in nature so as to be able to approach the research-argument from a more inclusive as well as comprehensive perspective that might be better suited to combine and integrate more ways of conceiving the hypothesis.

Activities Involved:

1. A detailed exposition of the post-Enlightenment exploration subculture and intense atmosphere of Continental rivalry over access to all kinds of probable and improbable locations across the vast expanses of the (still) largely unmapped oceans, - a subculture that was as much politically charged as it was academically promising.
2. Extensive Analyses of representative Early Australian Exploration Narratives, Settler Narratives, Fictional Geographies and the unique nature of Australian spatiality as explored and experienced through such texts.

3. Analyses of issues of onomastics, functional imagination, narrative ordering and modalities of aesthetic politics.
4. Critical commentary on textual-linguistic challenges and structures of negotiation with semantic, ethnographic and spatial alterity.
5. Analyses of generic specificities regarding constantly-evolving and devolving conceptualizations on travel and exploration and (mis)adventure and fictional travel; conforming and/or non-conforming to 'traditional', established generic expectations.
6. Exposition of the textual tension between predecessor and successor narratives and the sequential manufacturing of Australian Space through narrative-clusters.
7. An extensive study of contemporary reading communities, established textual customs and political situations that have been instrumental in the overall 'manufacturing' of the narratives.
8. Further analyses of sub-genres like fictional travel narratives and imagined topographies that represent alternately-imagined spaces, and the way they demonstrate how the Australian space is chiefly a palimpsest with fictive components oftener-than-not complementing their 'realistic' counterpart.

The Layout:

The chapters are arranged in such a way as to offer a thematic overview of the main line of argument and its gradual unfolding as it were; with the attention initially being on how the performance of exploration underwent a steady but inevitable transformation due to a multiplicity of conceptual changes wrought by the Enlightenment and associated emphasis on the developing parameters of 'functional intelligence' and information and its empirical validation. The argument simultaneously seeks to address the narratorial features and the overall nature of exploration/travel narrative as a distinctive generic development. As the thesis advances, the investigative focus shifts to specific examples and textual references to

illustrate narrative trends which are supposed to demonstrate how they fabricate specific responses to the event of spatial settlement in an island which is continental in proportions and unsettlingly singular in topographic specifics. Every chapter is further subdivided into three thematic segments that are supposed to achieve two purposes: one, to integrate the most relevant areas of enquiry with the particular target-area of the concerned chapter and two, to capture a logical progression of ideas expounded in the concerned chapter.

The First Chapter, "Accounts of Indecision", begins with a description of the altered status of the explorer after the Enlightenment as more was expected of him in so far as the generation of 'functional knowledge' was concerned. This chapter further investigates the aesthetic dimensions of an exploration narrative and has sought to trace the generic construction of the idea of the hero-as-the-quintessential-explorer that has effectively blurred the mutual status of the explorer and the hero in a narrative in which the hero is projected as the explorer and vice-versa; one whose journey would involve the explorer/hero undergoing the sort of habitual travails that render his spatial movement particularly significant. The chapter continues to explore in detail concepts like heterotopia and utopia among other related issues, as conceptual baggage of sorts in the formation of a figurative geography that characterizes textual engagements with a distinct slice of space-time. The chapter concludes with the idea that conceived as a performance; travel/exploration features a set of established practices that is ultimately responsible for an ontological dispersion of the self.

The Second Chapter, "Romantic Mis/Adventure and the Reworked Myth of Travel" opens with the popular visualization of the audacious explorer as a heavily-romanticized figure, one who is able to defy deathly threats and one whose exploits instill awe and wonder. This chapter builds upon the argument that a particular way of 'seeing' is a conscious political-representational, sometimes even an aesthetic choice that determines the nature of agency that the narrator is accorded vis-à-vis his surroundings. It further argues that since the 'variations' in the nature of the agency in effect determine the nature of subjective participation in the text, such an account might as well become an anticipatory process of 'filling-in' as the composite textual project aspires to live up to the generic and established expectations of what it means to be an explorer. This chapter continues to build up on the

idea of the exploration subculture as a targeted and historically situated activity of knowledge-creation that demanded a vigilant and conscious pursuance of the Baconian propositions of methodical categorization, objective professionalism and precisely-demarcated disciplinary divides. The chapter goes into deeper investigations of the discursive framework that authorizing agencies like the Royal Society specified and categorically insisted upon in order to construct a vertical architecture of information as it were, amassed through specific, regulated practices that were expected to be adopted in structured exploratory activities. This elaborate network of practices along with texts that corroborate such paraphernalia of performance went into the formation of exploration as an augmented *monomyth*.

The Third Chapter, "New World Explorations and the Hunt for Blank Spaces", deals with how exploratory activities helped Europe define itself in terms of hitherto-unmapped territories and were expected to solve certain enduring mysteries. These mysteries were consequent upon far-reaching elements of uncertainty when it came to conceiving the size of the observed and not-yet-observed but plausible landmasses that were supposed to have formed the planet. This chapter dedicates an entire section to a brief analysis of the colonization of the New World along with its legal underpinnings, and has tried to locate the process of settlement within a discursive architecture of juridical justification. The preparation for settlement and structures of justification that accompanied such an act of infiltration were no less textual and discursive than it was physical and entrepreneurial. This chapter also seeks to interrogate the mapmaking processes that were adopted in different continents and influenced different modalities of exploratory documentation- both on land and sea. Cartographic practices, suited to different locales, yielded different conceptions of space which gradually resulted in *notional spaces* that eventually were mapped onto their topographic counterparts.

The Fourth Chapter, "Inroads into Australia and the Idea of a Continent" primarily concerns itself with the unique, singular status of Australia as the 'newest' continental landmass. This 'newness' was perceived to be emblematized through a geography which was conspicuous in the way its *physical* nature was inextricable from its heavily *mythicized*, *hypothetical*

counterpart. As the chapter progresses, it seeks to establish particular modalities of ethno-spatial engagement as can be discerned from references to specific texts. The overall impression of the noticeable elements of structural similarity and repetition in early Australian exploration narratives is one of continuous narrative development, - a threaded, sequential progression taking place across narratives. This chapter would analyze specific texts as narratives that enshrine subjective engagements with a bizarre reality which strained Continental proportions of space, flora and fauna. The Australian topography essentially absorbs the gaze, generating texts that struggled to incorporate the indefinable into known schemes of signification.

The Fifth Chapter, "Inroads into Australia and the (De)constructed Geographies", also the last chapter of the thesis, takes the main strands of argument further and tries to address the unresolved issue of coming to terms with the singular Australian reality which is characterized by a perceived absence of a spatiotemporal *essence,* as it were. It seeks to investigate textual attempts at constructing those 'missing' reference-points in the descriptive devices employed by explorer-narrators who tried to turn their accounts into *core narratives* of sorts that might be instrumental in the formation of a national identity, the Australian identity. Once a stable colony was established, a network of expeditionary inroads into the continental landmass and framework of interactions with the natives needed to be in place and both were characteristically different here than in any other place on the planet. This text-generated sense of spatial construction can never be satisfactorily dissociated from the unfolding of Australian history. This history, in turn, is never untethered from a composite sense of subjective belonging and a personal sense of time and more significantly, geography.

Conclusion:

The most queer, peculiar thing about the landmass that has come to be known as Australia (including New Zealand and Tasmania) is the fact that the existence of this entire continent had been a purely speculative one until only about 225 years ago or so. The post-

Enlightenment *informational discourse* that so comprehensively and confidently aspired to decode and stratify an unprecedented overexposure to an unsettling profusion of images, references and associations of different shades of the Other, all made possible due to the audacious overseas explorations spanning no less than four centuries, encountered a unique problem while exploring the Australian interior and *preparing* it for settlement. The sheer volume of empty, unused space vexed Continental expectations of topographic and spatial proportions. Topological uniformity and an absence of geomorphological variety were similarly responsible for an entrenched sense of spatial unease.

Exploration and settler narratives, under such circumstances, become narratorial method of spatial organization, a verbal means of achieving a semblance of cartographic ordering. The texts under consideration, hence, are far more than objective descriptions of an alien locale; each text actively contributes to a palimpsestic and incremental configuration of a space that never was, a space that could be, and a space that might hold the promise of nation-formation. The exploration and settler narratives supplied the much-required mythic substratum of the Australian identity and the chief purpose of this project is to investigate *how* this semiotic filling-in has been achieved in these texts.

This thesis argues that every exploration, settler and alternate-geography narrative written on the Australian landmass is an inalienable constituent of an expansive toponymic imaginary that is as much concrete as it is ideational. This project further argues that in this way these texts become *solutions* to the intriguing, gnawing problem of the sequential manufacturing of a serviceable spatial formulation that was (remains?) sorely required to define the specificity and exceptionality of the Australian reality vis-à-vis the Old World and the New World.

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